18 INTRODUCTION

This introduction explains the organization and how to use Volume III, Responses to Public Comments, of the California High-Speed Train (HST) Program Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (Program EIR/EIS). Persons listed in this volume who submitted responsible written comments or provided oral testimony and who also gave their mailing addresses are being provided with an electronic copy of the Final Program EIR/EIS and appendices. Individual letters and comments included and addressed in this volume are organized and numbered with acronyms as follows:

- Federal Agencies—F (Chapter 18)

- State Agencies—S (Chapter 19)

- Local Agencies—L (Chapter 20)

- Organizations—O (Chapter 21)

- Individuals—I (Chapter 22)

- Public Hearings—PH (Chapter 23)

- Web Comments (comments sent electronically)—W (Chapter 24)

Each written submission and oral presentation can be found under the appropriate category, by name, or if representing an organization, the name of their organization. If a commenter gave oral or written testimony at one of the public hearings, they will find their comments, submissions, and responses under "Public Hearings." Those that sent comments via the Authority's website will find their comments and responses in Chapter 24, "Web Comments." Each written comment letter sent to the California High-Speed Rail Authority (Authority) or the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) was assigned an alphanumeric identifier. For example the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) comment letter is found in Chapter 18, "Federal Agencies," and its comment letter has been designated as F002. Each comment letter and the public hearing transcript has brackets in the right-hand margin with identification numbers for each comment. Some letters or oral statements have been treated as a single comment, whereas in others multiple comments have been identified, numbered and responded to individually. Again, using the USFWS as an example, 12 different responsible comments were identified in this comment letter (F002-1 through F008-12). The responses to comment(s) are located at the end of each letter or transcript. Each response is labeled with the letter/testimony identifier and comment number (such as F008-1) that relates back to that particular bracketed comment.

Some comments from the same agency, organization, or individual were submitted more than once (e.g., letter was first faxed and then mailed). These duplicate comment letters are included only once and are noted with an asterisk in the table of contents for this volume.

18.1 STANDARD RESPONSES TO FREQUENTLY RAISED COMMENTS

As part of the public review process from July 20, 2007 to October 26, 2007 for the Program EIR/EIS, the Authority and FRA received more than 400 comment letters containing more than 1,300 individual comments on the Draft EIR/EIS and on the proposed project generally. The following standard responses are intended to provide broad responses to the most frequently raised issues, and to supplement individual responses to comments.

- Standard Response 1—The Programmatic Decision Selecting a HST Alignment and Station Locations Between the Bay Area and Central Valley: *Some comments expressed confusion over the nature of the decision to be made based on this programmatic environmental document.*

- Standard Response 2—The Nature of a Programmatic Level of Analysis and Tiering Under NEPA and CEQA: *Some comments expressed frustration with the level of detail of analysis in the programmatic EIR/EIS and questioned whether it was adequate for identifying impacts and distinguishing between alternatives.*

- Standard Response 3—The Environmental Tradeoffs Among Network Alternatives: *Many comments advocated the Altamont Pass, many others advocated the Pacheco Pass, and still others the Pacheco Pass with Altamont Pass (local service). Some of these comments were directed at the choice to be made by the Authority and the FRA, while others questioned the environmental analysis in the Draft Program EIR/EIS related to that choice. Some comments suggested it was difficult to compare the environmental impacts of the alternatives in the Draft Program EIR/EIS.*

- Standard Response 4—The Role of the HST System in Influencing Growth: *Some comments questioned the role of the HST system in influencing growth, and the HST system's influence on station areas and local jurisdiction's growth.*

- Standard Response 5—The Role of Mitigation Strategies: *Some comments suggested the mitigation strategies in the EIR/EIS are too general and that the EIR/EIS should revise them to make them more specific.*

The Bay Area to Central Valley HST Final Program EIR/EIS consists of the Draft Program EIR/EIS, oral and written comments on the Draft Program EIR/EIS, and the Final Program EIR/EIS. The Final Program EIR/EIS contains revised analysis and text, plus the comments and responses to comments on the Draft Program EIR/EIS. As explained in the Final Program EIR/EIS, this is the first phase of a two-tiered environmental review process, and the analysis has been prepared for the first and programmatic-level of review and consideration of early policy decisions on the HST system. These documents have been prepared to support Authority and FRA decisions on the following:

> To determine which of the conceptual corridors, alignments, and station options evaluated in the Bay Area to Central Valley HST Final Program EIR/EIS can be eliminated from consideration and which to select for further consideration in the tiered environmental reviews to be prepared subsequent to the Program EIR/EIS, if the Co-lead agencies choose to pursue the high speed train system.

The programmatic level of analysis presented in the Program EIR/EIS is appropriate for making these two basic decisions. It analyzes the environmental effects at a more generalized level to provide the decision makers with sufficient information to decide whether to continue with the process to pursue an HST system, and which conceptual corridor alignments to continue to consider. If the Authority and the FRA decide to do so, they will consider the more site-specific decisions in the more detailed project level environmental review and decision making.